

GHOST

CALLS

EMMA TALBOT

Exhibition Notes | Wed 28 April - Sun 8 August 2021

DCA
Dundee Contemporary Arts

152 Nethergate
Dundee, DD1 4DY
01382 432444
Scottish Charity No. SCO26631

Open Wed - Sun 11:00-18:00
Open late Thu 19:00
Admission free
www.dca.org.uk

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

Emma Talbot's work explores visual autobiography in a truly unique way. Through drawing, painting, animation and three-dimensional making, she articulates internal narratives as visual poems or associative ruminations, based on her own experience, memories and psychological projections.

Incorporating her own writing, often informed by literary and poetic sources, Talbot combines painted text, figurative depiction, mark-making and pattern to shift the registers and readings of her work between the symbolic and the everyday. The imagery in her work is direct and hand-drawn, resulting in immediate, open, inventive representations of what is seen in the mind's eye.

'My work moves between an internal, personal, private scope of thinking and a wider, external response to prevalent contemporary concerns. The movement between the two spaces of thinking is very important, because it encompasses the continual shift we all experience between inner monologue and external world.'

The relationship between the physical presence of the work and the fleeting nature of the subject is considered through particular materials: delicate drawings on thin, hand-made papers are folded and lightly fixed to the walls; larger painted works are made directly onto silk, which is sewn in sections to make drifting hangings and installations. Her most recent three-dimensional pieces are constructed by hand with simple processes, such as papier-mâché, and stitched soft forms. The exhibition comprises a new body of work encompassing all of these means of making, as well as a new film animation.

Talbot's work considers complex issues such as feminist theory and storytelling, ecopolitics and the natural world, and pertinent questions regarding our shifting relationships to technology, language and communication. In this ungraspable moment, when our world is more uncertain than ever, Talbot imagines future environments where humankind has been flung out of a capitalist-driven society of digital technologies and must look towards more ancient and holistic ways of crafting, making and belonging to survive.

This new body of work at DCA has been in development since 2018, but everything was physically created between May and October 2020, when Talbot's thinking around a world-altering event or shift in the status quo was understandably accelerated by the effects of the global pandemic we find ourselves in.

'I'm imagining (without having to imagine really because it's happening all around us), a huge crash of the systems we've been reliant on, and asking what we will

notice, care about, think of as important, when we step out of the wreckage. I wanted to consider what would have to happen after such an event, how we (as an era/age of living humans) would continue with our lives.'

In her early research for this show, Talbot visited spaces in Dundee such as the The McManus Art Gallery and Museum and was struck by early 20th century Celtic Revival paintings such as John Duncan's 1911 work *Riders of the Sidhe*, which depicts a procession of mythical figures and creatures moving through an unknown Scottish landscape. Delving further into Celtic histories, she became very interested in the ancient tradition of 'keening'. Keeners were professional mourners who would visit homes of the recently deceased to perform lamentations and keening songs to help escort souls from this world into the next. The artist's thinking on these figures, who were often women, has formed the foundational story of this exhibition.

'I liked the narrative premise of a group of women in the work, taking on our grief, guiding us out of a crash and into a space that tunes in to wider histories, ancient landscapes, the ghosts of the past, the wildness of nature but also a kind of magical, unexpected relationship with the unfamiliar.'

These women, or keeners, appear throughout the exhibition in different forms. The first silk work that confronts a viewer at the entrance to the gallery depicts the cataclysmic event or crash that reconfigures the world. The second huge silk piece that cuts across the gallery shows these women moving through this newly broken world, exploring and being transported through fantastical landscapes by mythical birds, whilst ghostly apparitions float overhead. Elsewhere in the exhibition, three-dimensional works flanked by beautiful drawings bring these women into physical form and capture them in different acts of gathering, striving, journeying and exploring.

All of these narrative threads are drawn together and infused with movement and sound in Talbot's new animation *Keening Songs*. Punctuated by the artist's poetic texts and accompanied by an other-worldly soundtrack of percussive rhythms, electronic melodies and wailing vocal intonations, we see these women move and mourn and care for one another, encountering different animals, ghosts and unknown spirits along the way.

With this new body of work, Talbot invites us to imagine these unknown futures together and think carefully about how we move through our contemporary moment of undeniable uncertainty and change. As can be read at the end of the eponymous silk painting *Ghost Calls* in the gallery:

'This is not the end / let's use the time we have together / embracing / a forward movement without fear'

GLOSSARY

Feminist theory: Feminist theory is a school of thought that shifts assumptions, analytical lenses, and topical focus away from a dominant male perspective. In doing so, feminist theory shines a light on societal problems and issues that are otherwise overlooked or misidentified by the dominant histories within the world around us. Feminist theory has always been about viewing the world in a way that illuminates the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice, and in doing so, promotes the pursuit of justice and equality.

Ecopolitics: Ecopolitics, sometimes known as green politics, is a political ideology that aims to foster an ecologically sustainable society rooted in environmentalism, nonviolence, social justice and grassroots democracy.

Capitalism: An economic system in which trade, industry, and profits are controlled by private companies, instead of by the people whose time and labour powers those companies.

Holistic: Holistic means to encompass and consider the whole of a thing, not just one part. Holistic medicine, for example, looks at as many facets of a person as possible, not just at physical symptoms in a particular area.

Pandemic: A pandemic is an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area (such as multiple countries or continents) and typically affects a significant proportion of the population. We are currently living through a pandemic caused by an infectious virus called COVID-19.

John Duncan: John Duncan (1866–1945) was an artist from Dundee, and one of the leading representatives of the Celtic Revival in Scottish art. As well as Celtic imagery, he was inspired by art from the early Italian Renaissance. His output ranged from murals and paintings through to stained glass and book illustrations.

Celtic Revival: The phrase Celtic Revival describes past movements in literature, the arts, and social practices in which legends, poetry, art, and spirituality of a distinctive kind were revived. Writers and artists identified these with the Celtic people in parts of pre-Christian and early Christian Europe. The Irish and Scottish Celtic Revivals took place toward the end of the 19th century and into the first two decades of the 20th century.

Keening: As a noun, keening describes the action of wailing in grief for a dead person. The word originates from the Gaelic ‘caoineadh’ which means ‘crying’. Keening was a vocal ritual artform in traditional Gaelic communities in Scotland and Ireland, performed at the wake or graveside in mourning of the dead. Keens are said to have contained raw unearthly emotion, spontaneous words, repeated motifs, crying and elements of song. Structure was provided by banging on the coffin and the ground, as well as repeating familiar refrains and sounds.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Emma Talbot (b. 1969, UK) studied at the Birmingham Institute of Art and Design and the Royal College of Art. She currently holds the post of Tutor in Painting at the Royal College of Art's School of Arts and Humanities.

Her work has previously been exhibited at Eastside Projects, Birmingham; Arcadia Missa, New York; GEM Kunstmuseum, The Hague; Petra Rinck Galerie, Düsseldorf; Turner Contemporary, Margate; Drawing Room, London; The Freud Museum, London; Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam; Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen and Tate St. Ives, Cornwall.

In March 2020 she was awarded the 8th Max Mara Prize for Women in collaboration with Whitechapel Gallery London and Maramotti Foundation Italy, and through this award is working towards a solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 2021/22. She is represented by Galerie Onrust, Amsterdam and Petra Rinck Galerie, Düsseldorf.

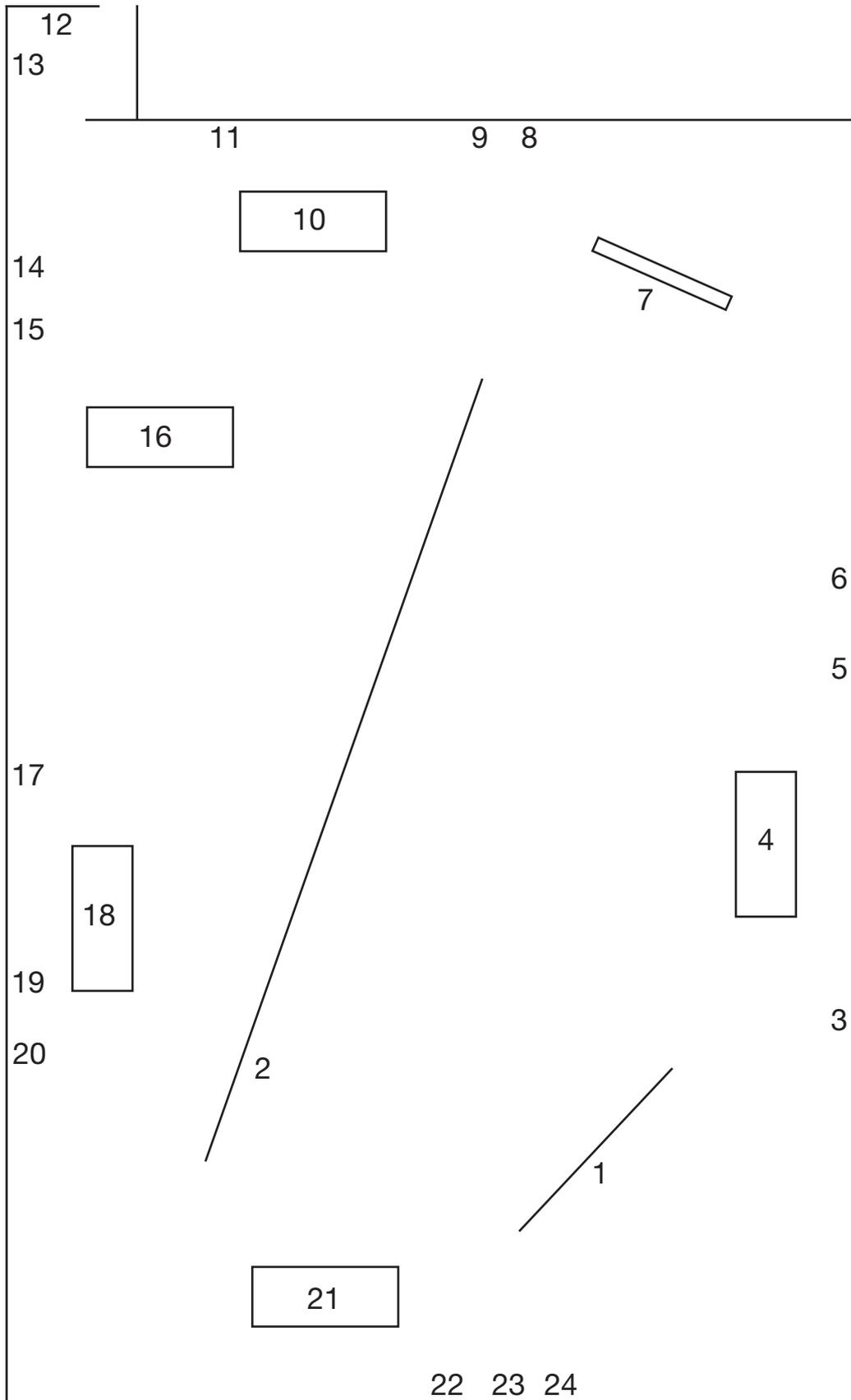
NEW PUBLICATION

Ghost Calls is a new book published as part of Talbot's exhibition. It contains newly commissioned writing by Helen Charman and So Mayer, as well as a conversation between the artist and DCA's Head of Exhibitions, Eoin Dara.

Copies are available to read in the gallery and the Information Space, and to buy in DCA Shop and online at a special price of £8 for the duration of the exhibition (usually £10).

A book launch and conversation with Helen Charman, So Mayer and Emma Talbot will be held online on Thu 27 May. Full details can be found in the Talks and Events section of these notes.

EXHIBITION FLOOR PLAN



1. *A Crash in Fast and Slow Motion*
Acrylic on silk, 2020

2. *Ghost Calls*
Acrylic on silk, 2020

3. *Wind Blown Tree*
Watercolour and acrylic on paper,
2020

4. *Mountain in Moonlight*
Various media, 2020

5. *Heather*
Watercolour and acrylic on paper,
2020

6. *Keening Woman - Island*
Watercolour and gouache on Khadi
paper, 2020

7. *Keening Songs*
Animation, 2020
14 minutes 21 seconds

8. *Winter Sky*
Watercolour and gouache on Khadi
paper, 2020

9. *Souls Depart*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

10. *Weeping Willow*
Various media, 2020

11. *Signs*
Watercolour and acrylic on Khadi
paper, 2020

12. *The Sound of a Crash, Silent*
Watercolour on paper, 2020

13. *The Smashed World*
Watercolour on paper, 2020

14. *Ghost*
Watercolour and acrylic on paper,
2020

15. *Crash*
Watercolour and acrylic on paper,
2020

16. *Mirrored Landscape*
Various media, 2020

17. *Celtic Birds*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

18. *Dreaming Woman*
Various media, 2020

19. *Dreamscape*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

20. *Drowned*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

21. *Meeting Place*
Various media, 2020

22. *Coloured Tree*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

23. *Animal*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

24. *Keening Women*
Watercolour on Khadi paper, 2020

INFORMATION SPACE

Visit the Information Space next to the galleries to learn more about the exhibition. Here you will find a video interview with the artist, alongside the reading materials listed below that have been influential to her thinking.

READING LIST

Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, 2018

Celts: Art and Identity, The British Museum Press, 2015

Helen Charman, *In the Pleasure Dairy*, 2020

Helene Cixous, *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, 1992

Margaret Elphinstone, *The Incomer*, 1987

Clarice Lispector, *Água Viva*, 1973

James Lovelock, *Novacene: The Coming Age of Hyperintelligence*, 2019

So Mayer, *A Nazi Word for a Nazi Thing*, 2020

Edna O'Brien, *Night*, 1972

Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain*, 1977

Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times, Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, 2015

Hito Steyerl, *The Wretched of the Screen*, 2012.

What's Love (or Care, Intimacy, Warmth, Affection) Got to Do with it?, e-flux journal & Sternberg Press, 2017

TALKS AND EVENTS

For more information and to book tickets visit www.dca.org.uk

Keening Songs: Online Screening

Fri 30 April – Sun 2 May

Fri 28 May – Sun 30 May

Fri 25 June – Sun 27 June

Fri 23 – Sun 25 July

Fri 6 – Sun 8 August

Online via DCA's Vimeo channel

For one weekend every month during the run of the exhibition we are staging an online screening of Talbot's new animated film *Keening Songs* on DCA's Vimeo channel. Between 11:00 on a Friday morning until 18:00 on a Sunday evening in April, May, June, July and August, audiences can watch from home a short interview with Talbot introducing her practice and this new body of work at DCA, followed by a screening of *Keening Songs*.

Ghost Calls: Book Launch and Conversation with Helen Charman, So Mayer and Emma Talbot

Thu 27 May, 18:00-19:30

Online via Zoom

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Ghost Calls is a new book published as part of Talbot's exhibition at DCA. It contains newly commissioned writing by Helen Charman and So Mayer, as well as a conversation between the artist and DCA's Head of Exhibitions, Eoin Dara.

Join us to celebrate the launch of the book with an evening of conversation, readings and screenings hosted by Eoin Dara. The evening will include a screening of Talbot's newest animation work, a reading by Charman of her new poem *Worm-Talk*, and a reading by Mayer of their new experimental text *Listen to the State of Us*, followed by a wider conversation and Q&A.

Helen Charman is a writer and academic based in Glasgow. Her second pamphlet, *Daddy Poem*, was shortlisted for the 2019 Ivan Juritz Prize; her latest, *In the Pleasure Dairy*, is published by Sad Press. Her first nonfiction book, *Mother State* – a political history of motherhood – is forthcoming from Allen Lane. She teaches English Literature at Durham University, and is an associate member of staff at Camberwell College of Arts and the Glasgow School of Art. As resident commissioning editor at MAP magazine, she is running the year-long TENANCY project.

So Mayer is a writer, bookseller, film curator, and organiser. In 2020, they published *A Nazi Word for a Nazi Thing* (Peninsula Press), an essay on art, bodies and fascism. Their other books include film criticism such as *Political Animals: The New Feminist Cinema* (IB Tauris, 2015) and poetry such as *jacked a kaddish* (Litmus Publishing, 2018), as well as contributions to anthologies such as *Spells: 21st Century Occult Poetry* (Ignota, 2018), *At the Pond* (Daunt, 2019) and *On Relationships* (3 of Cups, 2020). Mayer works with queer

feminist film curation collective Club des Femmes, and is a founder of Raising Films, a campaign and community for parents and carers in the UK screen sector.

Emma Talbot and Anne Tallentire in Conversation

Thu 24 June, 18:00-19:00

Online via Zoom

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Join us for a conversation between Talbot and Anne Tallentire, two artists who have known each other and respected one another's work for over a decade.

Talbot's new body of work at DCA will be the starting point of a conversation around practice, research, art and exhibition making. The evening will be hosted by Eoin Dara, and there will be an opportunity to ask both artists questions following their conversation together.

Anne Tallentire is an artist living and working in London. Her practice encompasses moving image, sculpture, installation, performance, and photography. Through visual and textual interrogation of everyday materials and structures, Tallentire's work seeks to reveal systems that shape the built environment and the economics of labour.

**In the Evening There is Feeling:
Reading Nan Shepherd**

Thu 15 July, 18:00-19:30

Online via Zoom

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Led by DCA's Head of Exhibitions, Eoin Dara, *In the Evening There is Feeling* is DCA's reading group. It takes its name from Gertrude Stein's 1914 book *Tender Buttons* and focuses, in an informal and welcoming way, on feminist and queer texts from the worlds of art and literature.

Connecting to Talbot's work in the gallery exploring future landscapes after a cataclysmic world event, this session will introduce and discuss some excerpts from Nan Shepherd's book *The Living Mountain*, offering up an extraordinary account of walking through and living with the Cairngorm mountains in Scotland.

Anna (Nan) Shepherd was born in 1893 and died in 1981. Closely attached to Aberdeen and her native Deeside, she graduated from her home university in 1915 and for the next 41 years worked as a lecturer in English. An enthusiastic gardener and hillwalker, she made many visits to the Cairngorms with students, friends and loved ones. In her lifetime she travelled further afield, but always returned to the house where she was raised and where she lived almost all of her adult life, in the village of West Cults, three miles from Aberdeen.

Written during World War II, the manuscript of *The Living Mountain* lay untouched for more than 30 years

before it was finally published in 1977. Shepherd's precise and poetic prose explores and records the rocks, rivers, creatures and hidden aspects of the Cairngorms. The book reimagined what nature writing could be, eschewing the typical patriarchal narrative of male dominion over any given landscape in favour of writing about connecting with the natural world in intimate and quietly profound ways.

To join the conversation, **book your place before 17:00 on Wed 14 July**. We will send you digital copies of the texts and details of the Zoom meeting upon booking. We will also send an audio recording of Eoin reading excerpts of the writing for those of you who may find it easier or more enjoyable to listen.

Curator's Tour

Thu 5 August, 18:00-19:00

Gallery 2

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Join our Head of Exhibitions, Eoin Dara, for a conversation in the gallery where he will be talking about working with Talbot over the past two years to develop the exhibition *Ghost Calls*.

Please note tickets are limited to allow for social distancing in the galleries – we recommend booking in advance.

FOR YOUNGER VISITORS AND FAMILIES

Please note that separate tickets are required for Create Space and *Ghost Calls*: book online, by phone or at DCA Box Office.

Create Space: Gallery 1

Wed – Fri, 11:00-13:00

Sat – Sun, 11:00-15:00

Gallery 1

Free, but ticketed

Please book in advance

Our new Create Space has been inspired by the exhibition and offers a range of making activities that link to the artist's ideas.

Families can get creative together by picking up one of our pre-packed *Ghost Calls* Art Activity Packs. Each pack includes coloured pencils or crayons and Activity Sheets or 'makes' to do both in Create Space and at home. Create Space has its own socially distanced seating area that allows you to spend time together safely.

We are also presenting a display of work made at DCA through our learning projects, including:

- Riso Prints by ST/ART@DCA with our partners, Tayside Healthcare Arts Trust
- DCA Young Photo Club's wall of photos

- Our 5 B's print project with Wellgate Day Support Centre
- THAT Project display made during lockdown, *Creative at Distance*, a combined photography and zine project

We are inviting visitors to leave their own artworks or stories in Create Space as part of our *Say Hello with Art* project. With this initiative, we are partnering with Dundee Pensioners Forum to reach out to older, more isolated people in our community.

Although designed with families and younger children in mind, we hope that visitors of all ages will enjoy spending some time in our Create Space imagining different worlds, sharing thoughts and feelings, and connecting with nature.

We also have an online programme of *Monday Makes* and activity sheets themed to the exhibition, including an animation tutorial, available on our website from May 2021.

JUST ASK

Our friendly Visitor Assistants are always happy to help with your questions.

LARGE PRINT AND BRAILLE

Large print and Braille versions of this leaflet are available, please ask a Visitor Assistant for more information.

KEEP IN TOUCH

Keep up to date with the very latest from DCA and sign up to receive email updates by visiting www.dca.org.uk or by following us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram. Tweet us your thoughts on the exhibition using **#helloDCA**.